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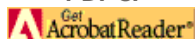
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Pawpaw possibilities

By CHRIS MILES
Special to the State Journal

Pawpaws, a little known fruit, might be Kentuckys next big farm product something easily grown and appealing to consumers.

Were really interested in fruit crops, said Kirk Pomper, a professor and principle investigator of horticulture working with the pawpaw fruit at Kentucky State University.

Pawpaw is one of a dozen crops that could reap benefits for Kentucky, he said.

The pawpaw is similar to a mango in looks and taste. Pomper describes the flavor as a mango-peach

Pomper says other fruits have not been successful lately. Apple production weakened because China market in eastern nations that once relied on the west coast for production. Peaches have been hit by

But pawpaw is very compatible with the Kentucky environment and it also has a lot of potential, he said to take the risks that growers arent when developing this fruit.

KSU began its pawpaw program in 1990 and Pomper has headed it for the past five years. The school receives between \$100,000 and \$200,000 annually in grants and U.S. Department of Agriculture funding. The school also receives toward salaries, equipment, materials and supplies.

Currently KSU is looking to develop and advertise the pawpaw for state farmers.

The pawpaw has many benefits, Pomper said. It naturally doesnt have a lot of pests so you dont need to use pesticides. It definitely has potential in the fresh market.

Moreover it is competitive for farmers.

Prices have been very good for the fruit, said Ilze Sillers, who owns an orchard of 300 pawpaw trees in Lincoln County. With tobacco being phased out I was looking for a new product. Pawpaw tastes really good. It sells for between \$2.50 to \$10.00 per pound.

Several years ago Sillers took part in a monthly program KSU held to promote its work with the fruit.

I was interested in trying to do something more productive with my farm, Sillers said.

Sillers said her trees, still young and developing, can produce around 40 pounds of fruit.

The down side is that they are very perishable, Sillers says. Its a lot like a banana. You have to pick it carefully to ensure it doesnt bruise.



KSU is now seeking ways to extend the shelf life of the pawpaw. But the fruits biggest demand is in it cream products.

Theres a lot of demand for it in ice cream, Pomper said. People who try it love it for its mango-peach cream is its largest mass appeal.

Valentines Gourmet Ice Cream, in Winchester, has even approached KSU about a deal on producing flavor.

Its a deal which Sillers hopes will become a common place between farmers and distributors with reg pawpaw.

I would love to see it become a great product of Kentucky, he said. 🌐

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